



HAMLET, Prince of Denmark

SHAKESPEARE CHILDREN'S STORY

MS 24962





Hamlet, Prince of Denmark



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About Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England (around 23 April 1564). He was the third of eight children born to John and Mary Shakespeare.

Shakespeare was a poet, playwright and dramatist. He is often known as England's national poet and the 'Bard of Avon'. Thirty-eight plays, one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, two long narrative poems and several other poems are attributed to him. Shakespeare's plays have been translated into every major existent language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.



Hamlet: The Prince of Denmark.
He is the son of the recently
deceased King Hamlet and
his wife, Queen Gertrude.

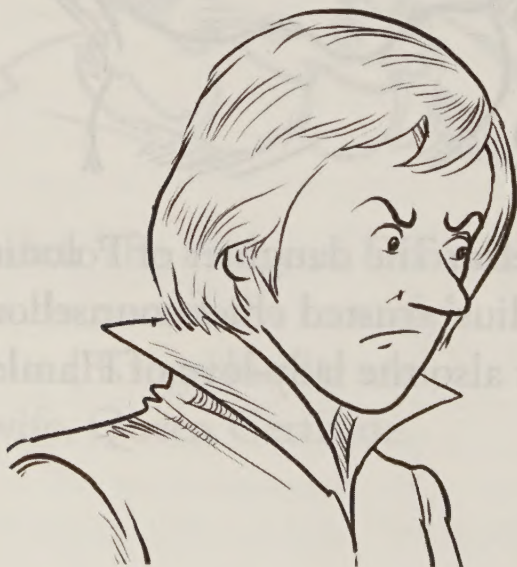


Ophelia: The daughter of Polonius, Claudius' trusted chief counsellor. She is also the lady-love of Hamlet.

Claudius: The new King of Denmark. He is the brother of the deceased King Hamlet, second husband to Queen Gertrude and uncle to Hamlet.



Laertes: The son of Polonius and the brother of Ophelia.



Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

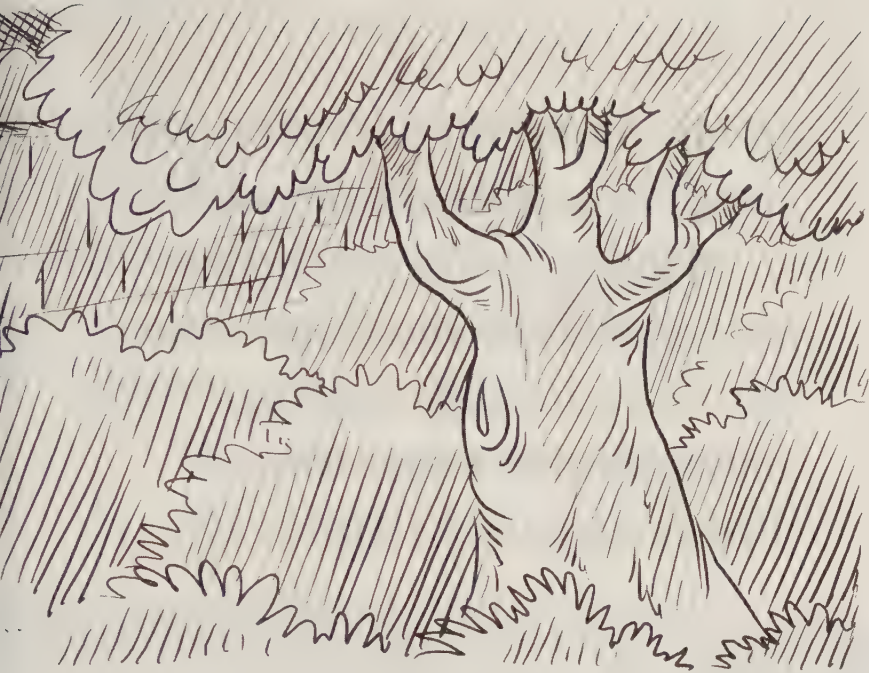
Hamlet was the Prince of Denmark. He was away studying at Wittenberg when one day, he received the unfortunate news that his father, the king, had passed away. As Hamlet tried to come to terms with the fact that his father was no more, he received further shocking news that his mother had married Claudius, the king's younger





brother and Hamlet's uncle. Therefore, Hamlet had also been deprived of the throne, which should rightfully have been his after his father's death.

As Hamlet was preparing to leave for home, a strange event was occurring at the royal castle in Denmark. The guards had been complaining of seeing a



strange shadow at night, which resembled the dead king, and they were sure that the strange occurrences were the return of the king's spirit. After repeated sightings of the ghost over a couple of nights, the guards finally



decided to inform Horatio,
Hamlet's best friend and advisor.

Horatio refused to believe
the guards, declaring that there
was no such thing as ghosts
and it must be a figment of
their imagination. However,

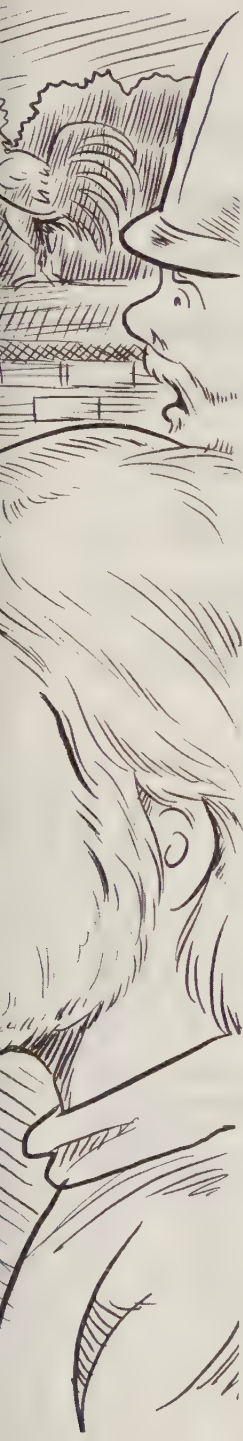


upon their insistence, he
decided to accompany them
one night and, lo and behold!
he too saw the ghost of the
deceased king appear.

Horatio could not believe
his eyes. He tried to speak to







the ghost, but just as the ghost tried to say something, a rooster declared a new day and the ghost disappeared. Horatio, now believing in the existence of the ghost, turned to the guards and said, "This ghost will certainly speak to Hamlet!"

Hamlet returned to Denmark and was completely taken aback by his mother's haste to remarry, and he certainly did not approve of Claudius.

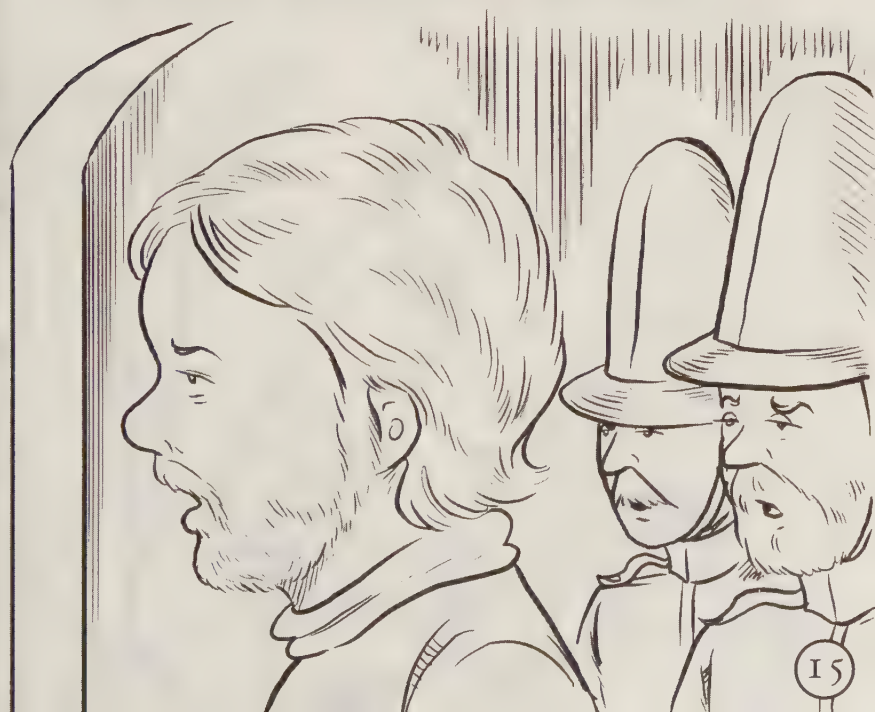


He could not
get the nagging
thought out of
his head that
his father had
not died a natural
death but had been murdered.
While lost deep in thought,
Horatio entered, accompanied



by the guards, and told Hamlet what he had seen. Hamlet assured Horatio that he would accompany them that night and wait for the ghost to appear.

Meanwhile, Laertes, the son of the king's chief advisor, Polonius, was getting ready to leave for France. His sister,



Ophelia, was in love with Hamlet. Though her brother and father consistently told her that she should not believe his claims of love for her, she paid no heed to their warnings, because deep within her heart she knew that he was madly in love with her.

Th at night, Hamlet, with Horatio and the guards, reached



the tower where the ghost usually appeared. As they stood talking in the cold night, Hamlet saw the spirit of his father appear. He tried to speak to the ghost, who then beckoned him to follow. At some distance from the others, the ghost said, "Yes, I am the





spirit of your father. And the reason I still walk the earth is because I was murdered.”

Hamlet gasped. He asked the spirit to tell him more. The



ghost continued,
“It is being said,
my son, that while
I lay asleep in the
garden, a serpent
bit me; but the
serpent that bit your
father now wears
his crown.” He
went on to explain
how while he was
asleep, his own
brother, Claudius,

poured the juice of the poisonous
herb Hebona into his ear,
killing him instantly.

It was morning
when the ghost fi
nished his story.



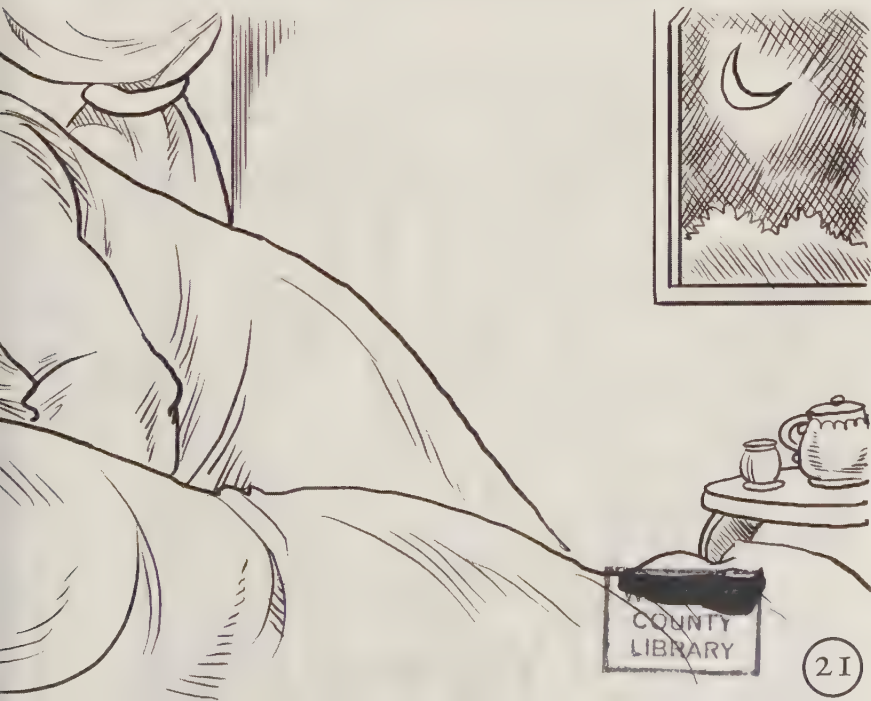
Swearing all those gathered there with him that night to secrecy, Hamlet decided it was time for him to act.

Over the next few days, Hamlet started acting rather mysteriously towards Ophelia. He pretended that due to



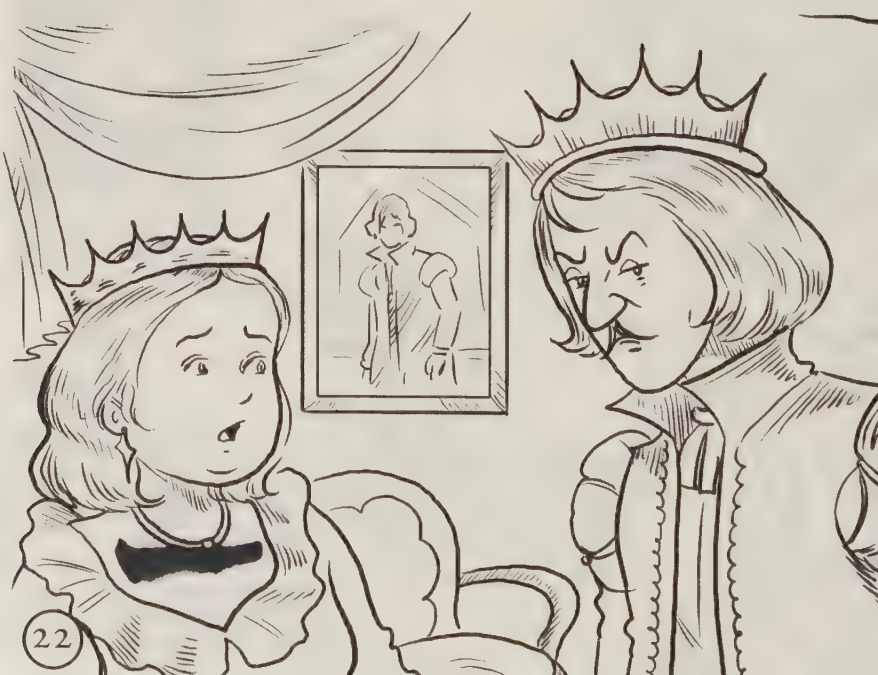
something troubling him, he had started to go mad. Ophelia informed her father about Hamlet's strange behaviour, and soon the matter came before the king and queen.

Polonius then made a plan to be sure about the prince's state of mind. He declared



that when Ophelia was with Hamlet the next day, he and King Claudius would stand behind the curtain and listen to what Hamlet had to say, which should give them a better idea of his mental problems.

As per the plan, when Hamlet went to meet Ophelia



the next day,
both Claudius
and Polonius
hid themselves
behind a curtain.



Hamlet said, "To be
or not to be, that is the question:
whether it would be nobler in
the mind to suffer the slings and
arrows of outrageous fortune,



or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them.” It was evident that Hamlet was talking about killing himself, and the king had heard enough. Claudius wanted Hamlet to leave for England immediately, sure that a change of scenery would help him to calm down.



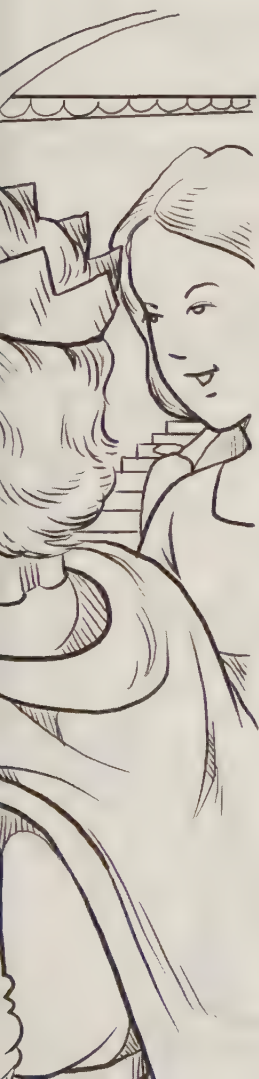
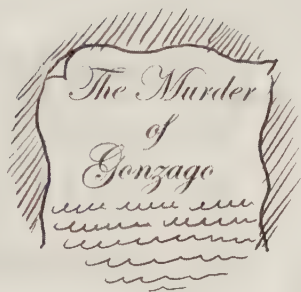
But the next day, a group of travelling actors came to see Hamlet. They requested that he allow them to stage a play for him that evening. Hamlet saw this as a golden opportunity to nail his uncle and his mother for their crimes against his dead father. He asked the troupe whether they could perform the



play 'The Murder of Gonzago'
for him. He also wanted to
make some modifications to
the original play and the troupe



assured him they would have no trouble in carrying out his wishes.



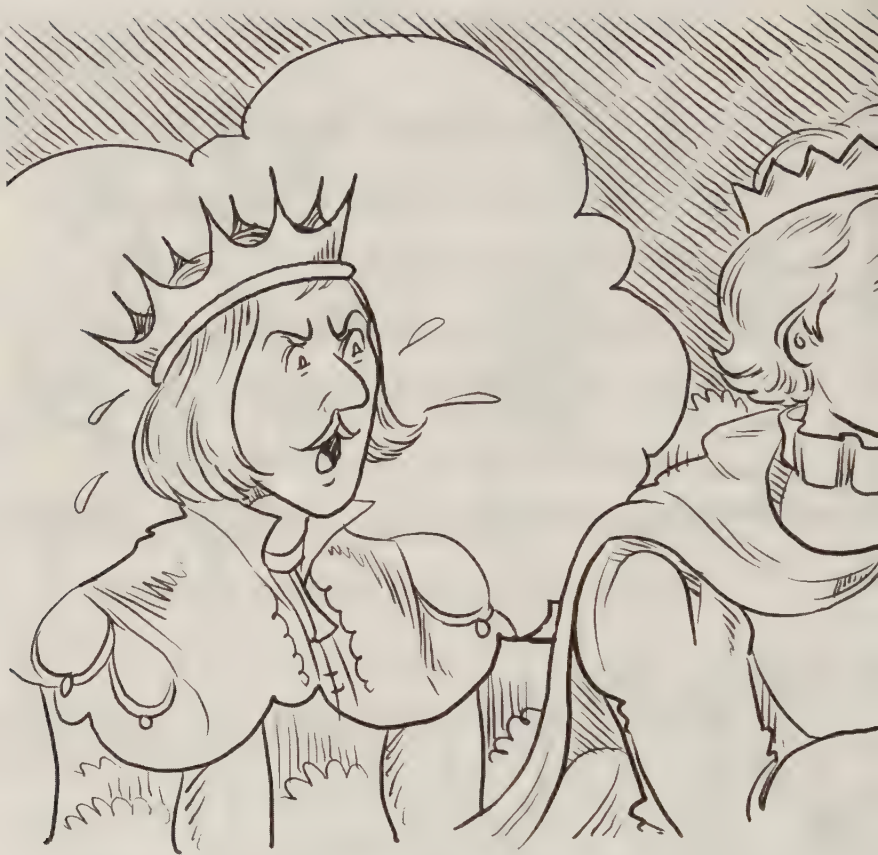
That night,
Hamlet kept a close
watch on his uncle.
Soon the play began.
It started with a man
sleeping and another
man coming over to
pour something into
his ear from a cup.
The man with the cup
was the other man's
brother, and had
murdered his brother
with the poison. As the
play was coming to a

close, King Claudius sprang from his seat and screamed, “Enough!”

As Hamlet and Horatio sat and discussed the matter, a servant informed Hamlet that his mother had sent for him. Since Polonius was not too sure about Hamlet’s mental state,

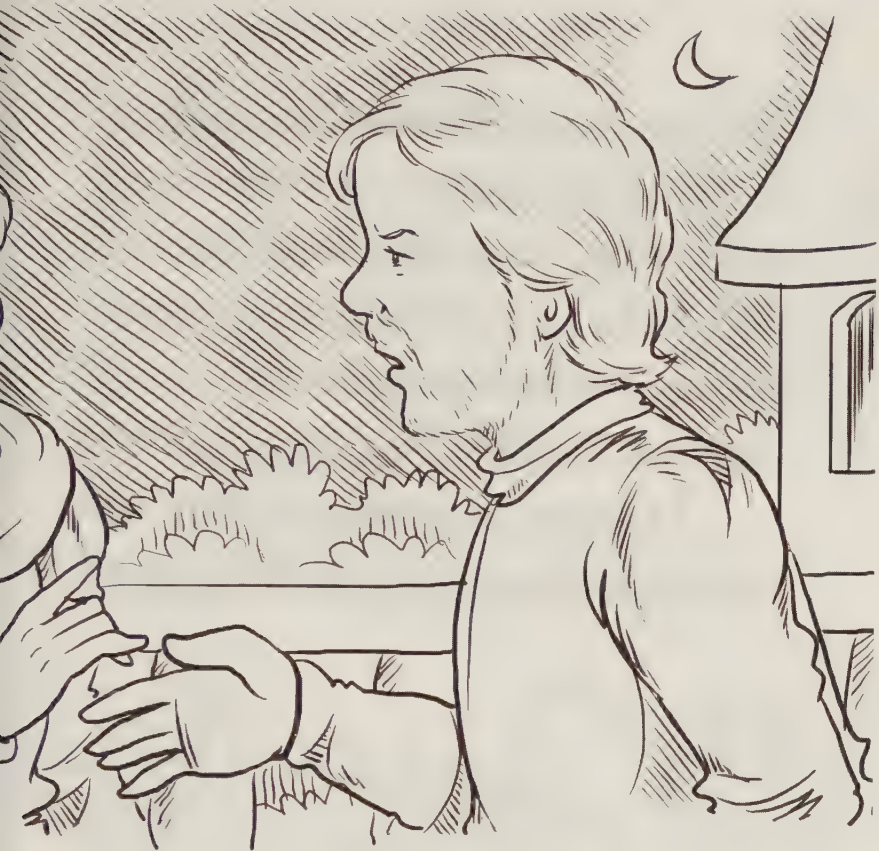






he decided to hide behind the curtain and intervene if Hamlet tried to harm his mother.

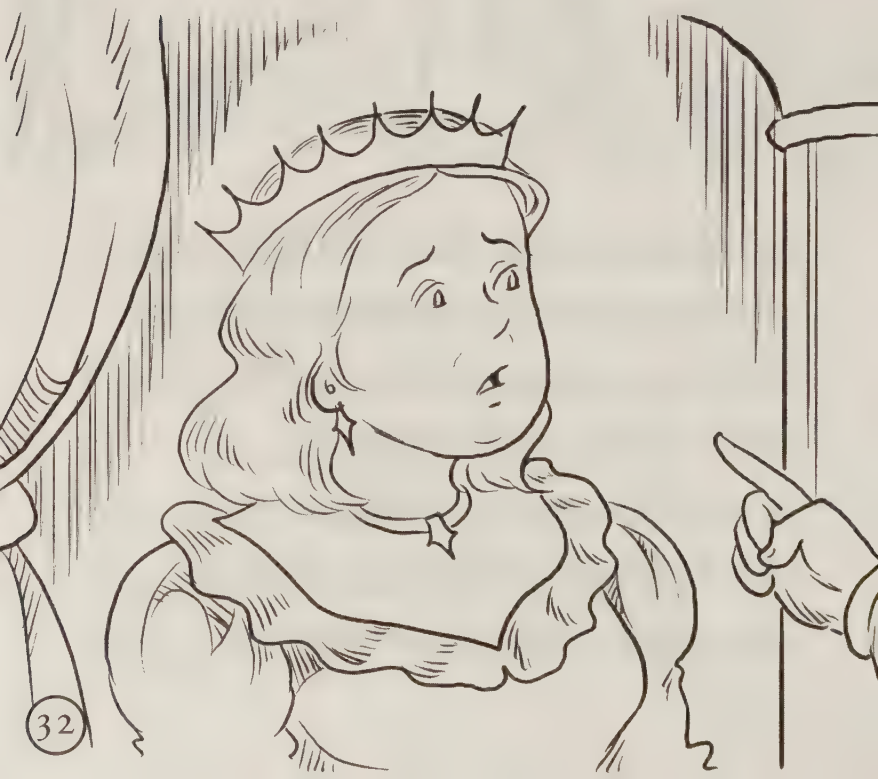
On seeing her son, Hamlet's mother at once accused him of troubling the king with the rendition of that



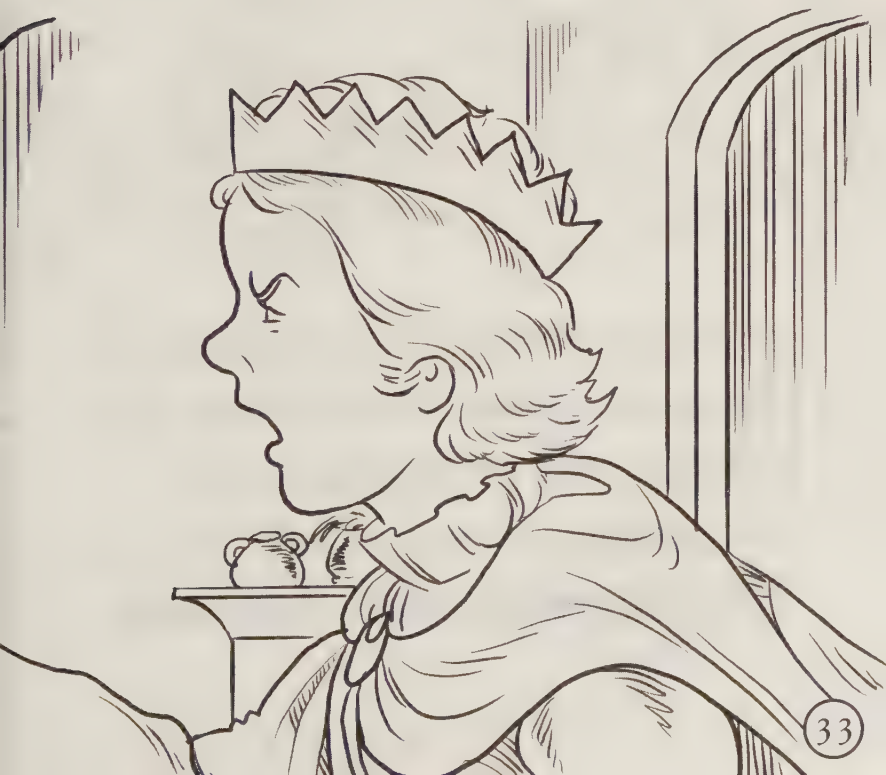
particular play. But Hamlet also very subtly accused her of being unjust towards his dead father. His mother pretended not to understand, but Hamlet persisted. And as she tried to avoid answering

his questions, Hamlet started to lose his patience. As his voice rose, Polonius, worried about the queen's safety, started to shout from behind the curtain, "Help the queen!"

Hamlet, thinking that it was Claudius hiding behind the

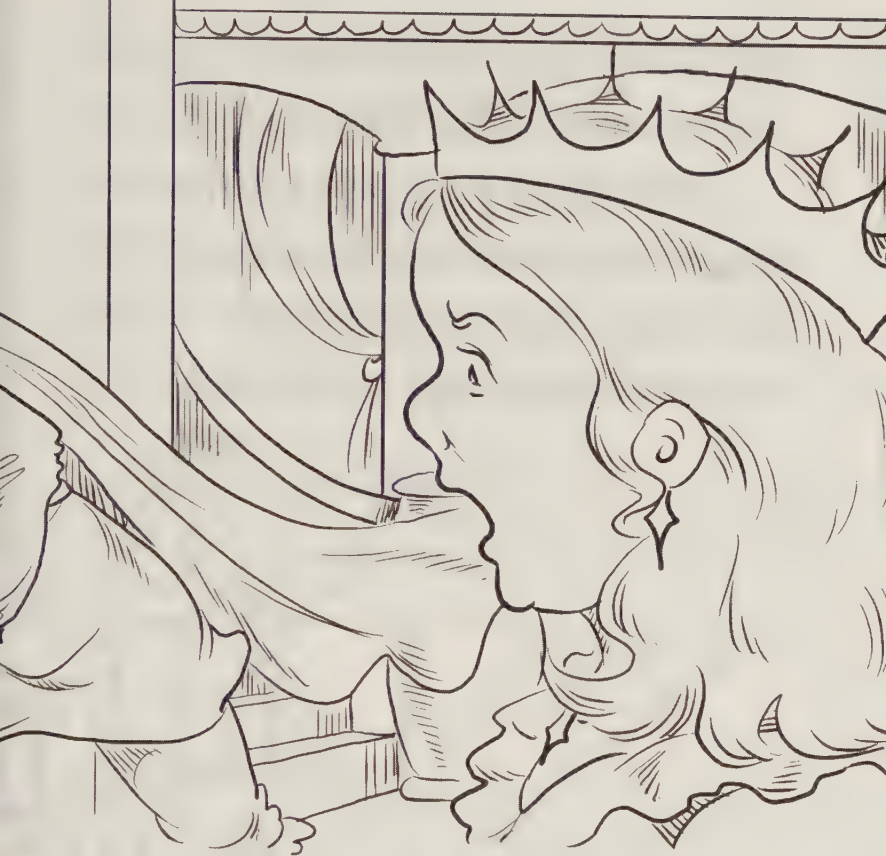


curtain, immediately drew his sword and thrust it through the material, killing Polonius instantly. Seeing that he had killed Polonius and not Claudius, Hamlet's anger grew. As his mother kept





trying to divert his questions about the death of his father, Hamlet was preparing to kill his mother when his father's spirit appeared again. The ghost

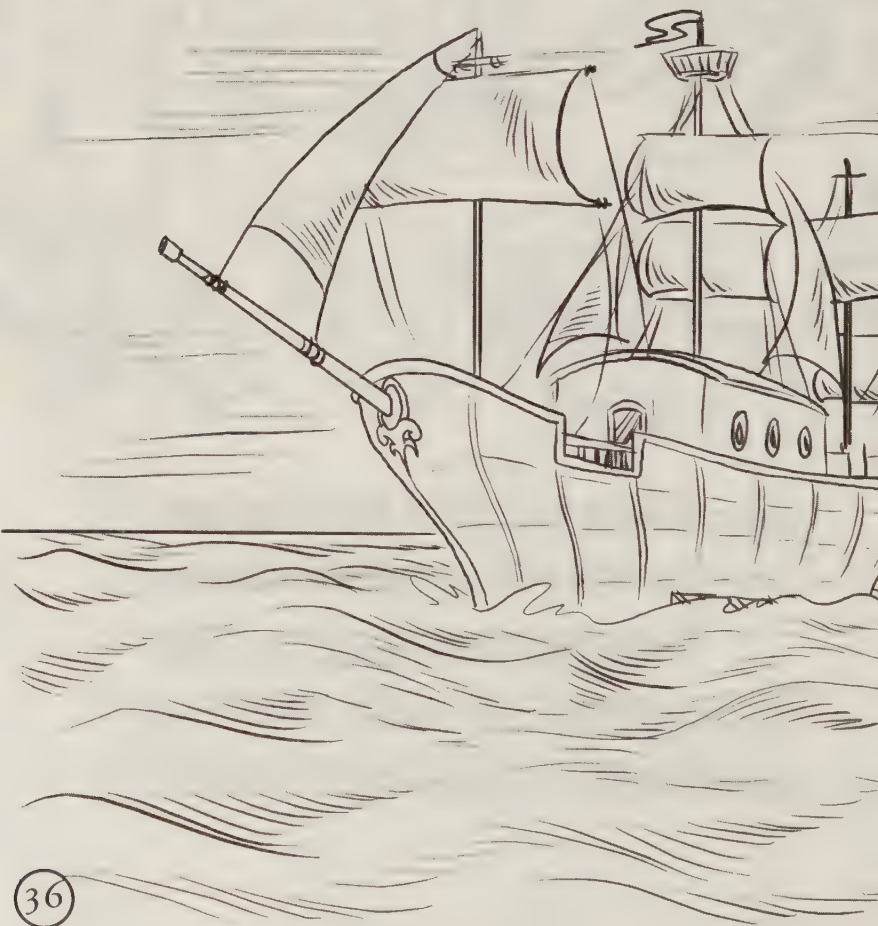


asked him to spare his mother
and go after the real murderer.

Meanwhile, Claudius had
decided that he could waste no
more time in sending Hamlet

away, and so put him on a ship to set sail for England.

While in France, Laertes heard what had happened to his father and immediately returned to avenge his death.



He was furious with the king and queen, as they had made no arrests. He came back leading a riotous group of men, claiming that Claudius was not fit to rule over them, and therefore





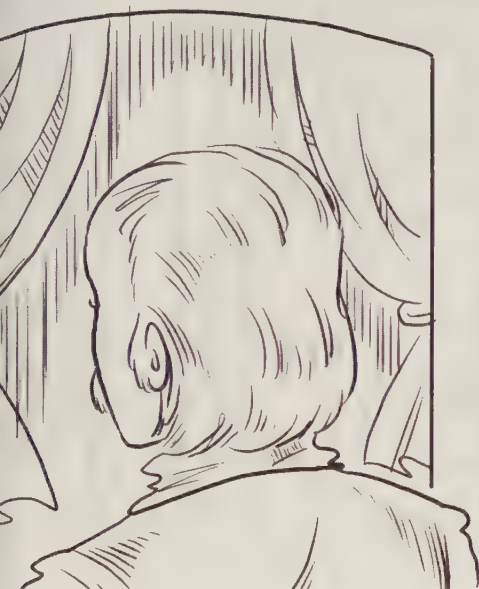
Laertes should be their new king. As he was arguing with the king, Ophelia walked in. It seemed that she had completely lost her mind, unable to bear the loss of her father. Laertes was heartbroken to see his sister in such a sorry state, and was now more intent than ever to





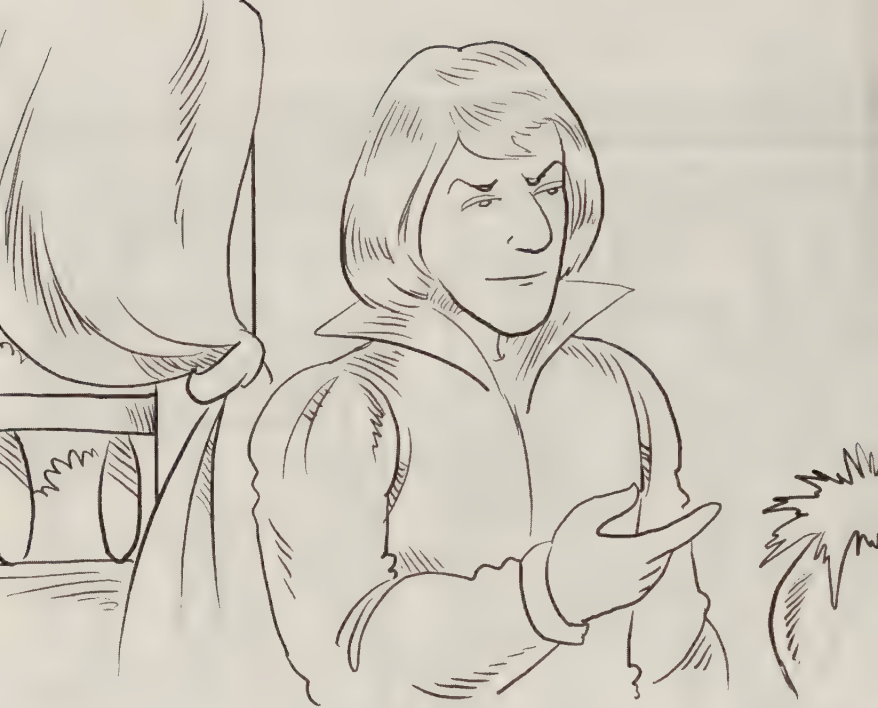
avenge the death of his father and his sister's state of delirium.

Now, while they were sailing for England, Hamlet's ship was attacked by pirates. In the fight that ensued, Hamlet boarded the pirate ship. His own ship managed to break away and sail

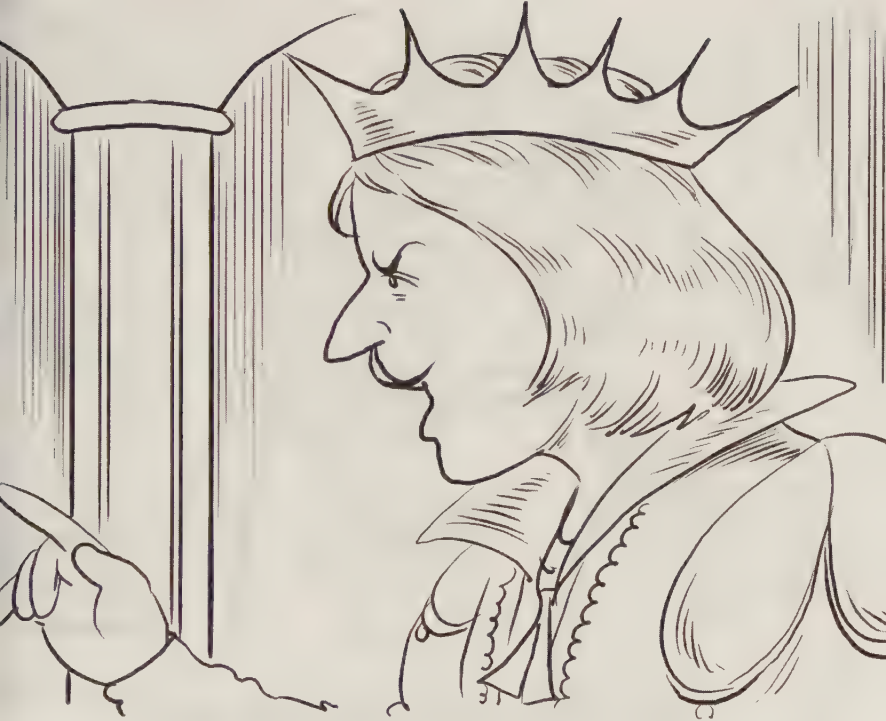


off, leaving Hamlet as a prisoner to the pirates. However, when he told the pirates who he was, he was dropped off at the nearest port and returned home.





Upon seeing Hamlet again, Claudius started making plans for his death. This time he went to Laertes and told him how Hamlet had killed his father, Polonius. This infuriated Laertes and he wanted to kill Hamlet immediately. Claudius asked Laertes to refrain for a while,



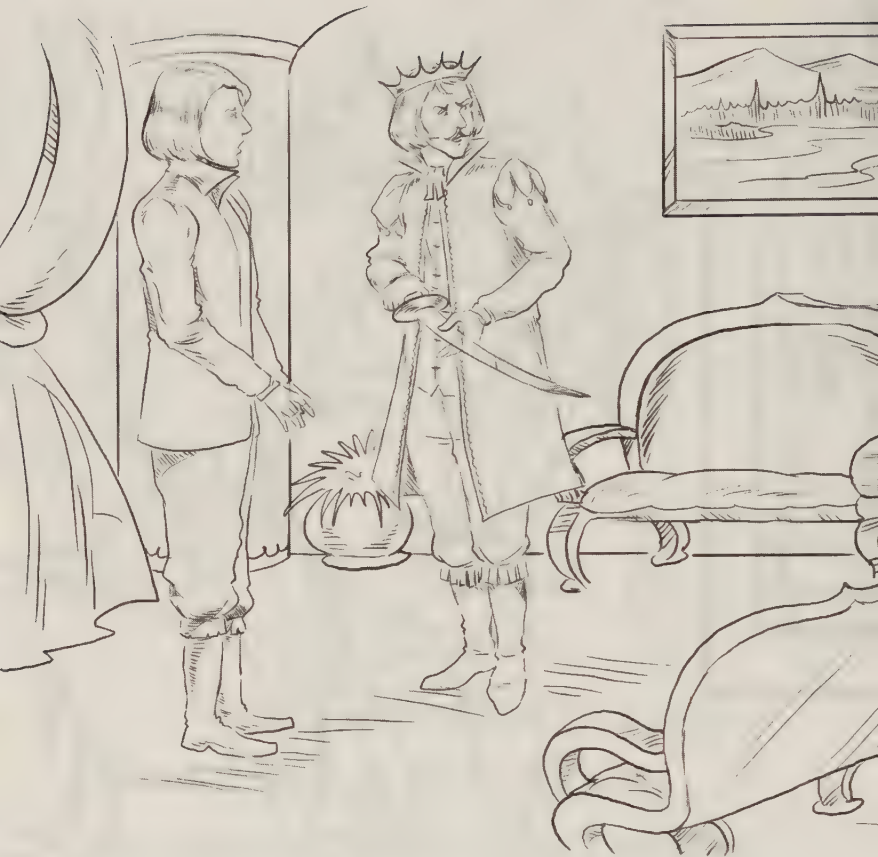
telling him that he would organise a sword duel. The plan was for Laertes' sword to be unprotected to allow him to fatally stab Hamlet, while Hamlet's sword would be blunt so as not to harm Laertes in any way.





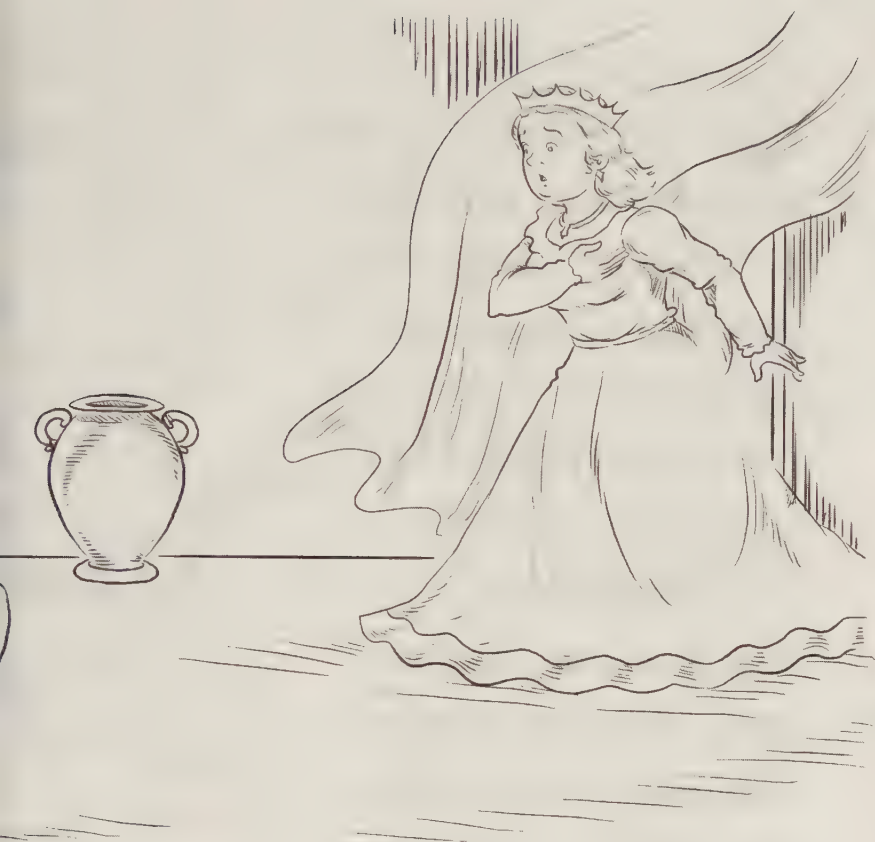
But Claudius did not stop there. He also declared that the tip of Laertes' sword would be dipped in a special poison, which had no antidote, making Hamlet's death certain. Finally, Claudius decided that if all the other plans were to fail, he would add poison to Hamlet's drink, and the moment he took





a sip, his energy would start to drain and he would soon die.

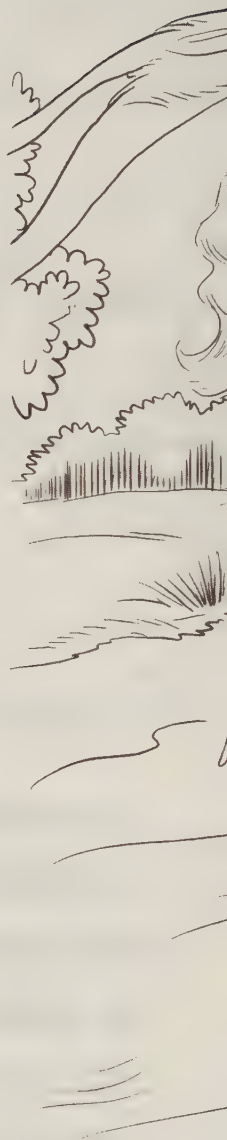
While the two men were discussing how to kill Hamlet, the queen came running in and declared that Ophelia had



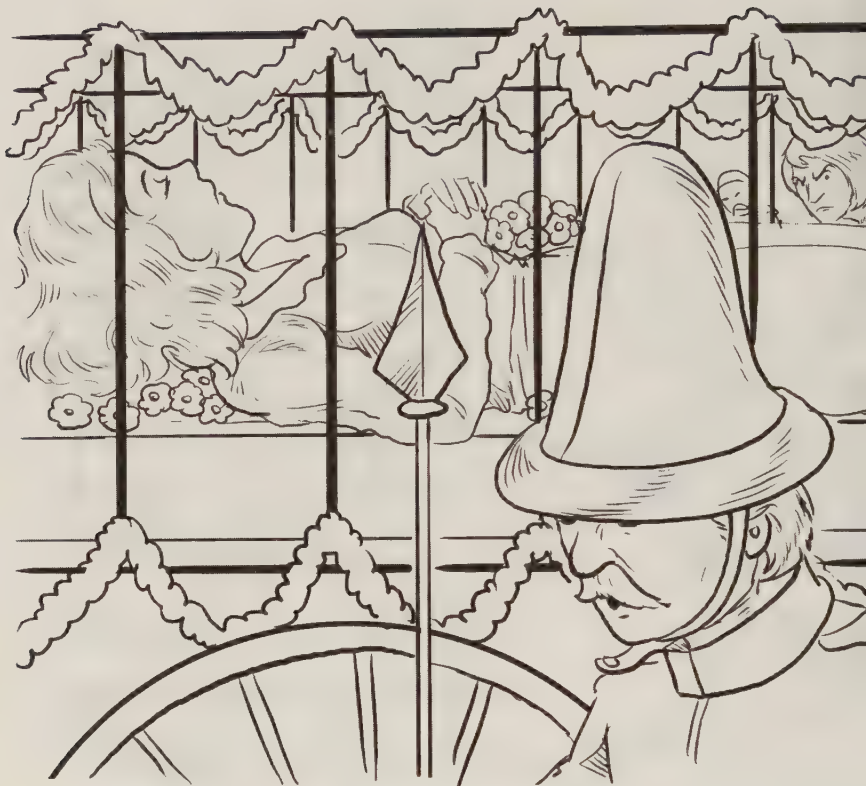
drowned. In her unsteady state of mind, the girl had gone to the banks of the river and tried to pluck some flowers from a tree, but while she was on a branch, a portion of it broke off and she went tumbling into the

river. She fainted as she hit the water and soon drowned. Laertes was shocked to hear this unfortunate news and could not believe his sister was no more.

Meanwhile, Hamlet and Horatio were walking towards the palace when they saw a huge funeral procession. It looked like a royal funeral, so they wondered who had passed away. Within a few minutes, Hamlet saw that the body being carried away was that of







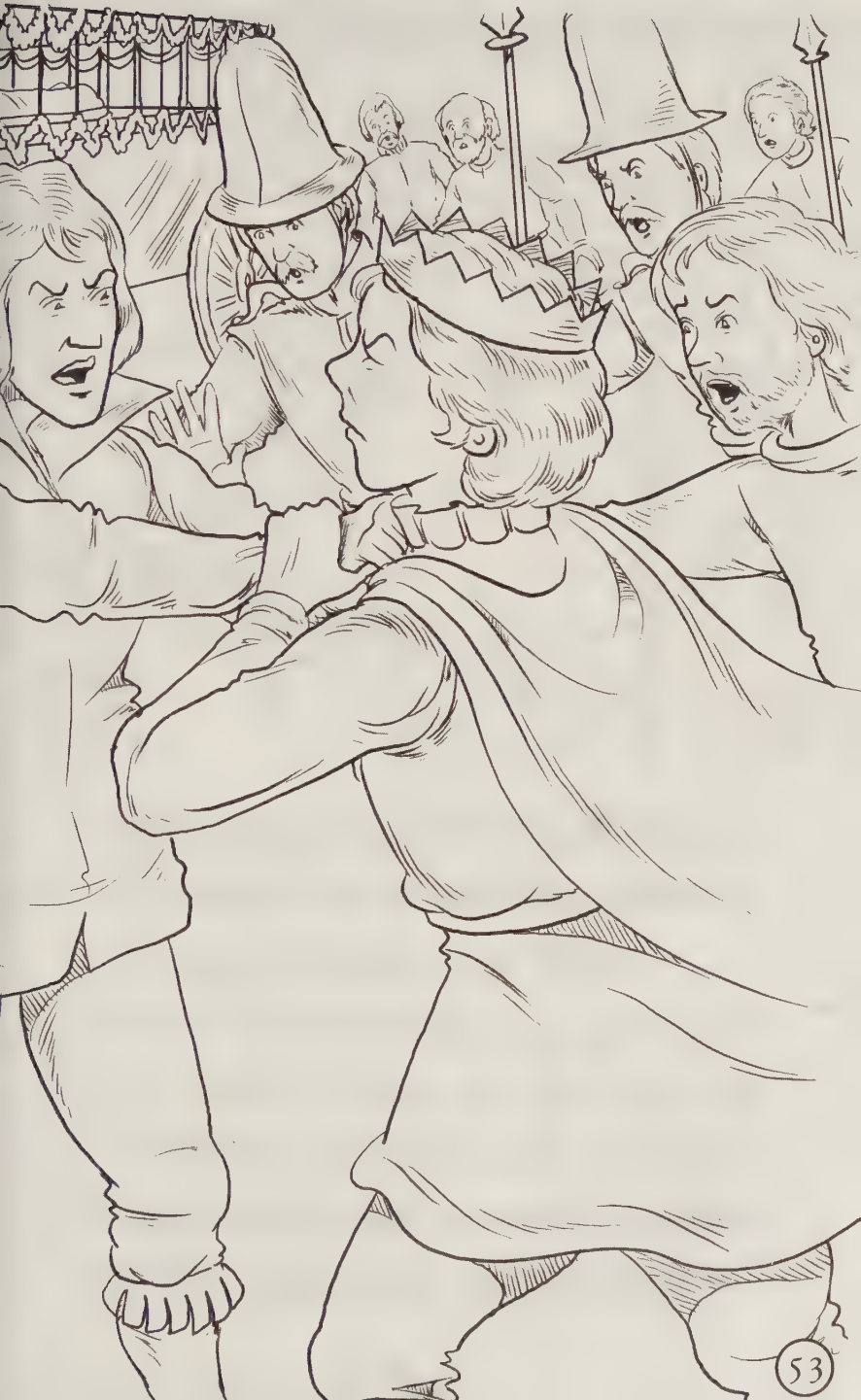
Ophelia. He was shocked, and could not understand how she could have died. Hamlet could no longer contain his sorrow and went running towards her. Laertes, on the other hand, was furious to see Hamlet arrive on

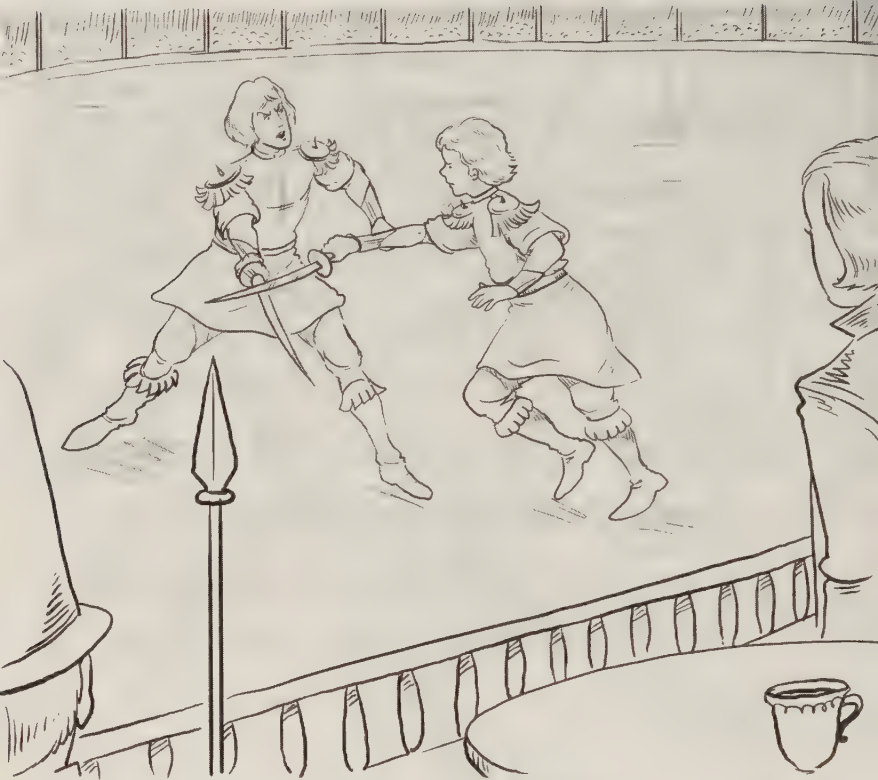


the scene, and without another thought, he rushed towards him and grabbed his throat. Soon they were involved in a struggle, but with the help of the people around them, they were parted.

Soon the king put his plan into action. He managed to convince Hamlet that Laertes had been named the 'best swordsman in France', and a match was arranged for the two men. Horatio tried to dissuade Hamlet, explaining that Laertes really was very good with the

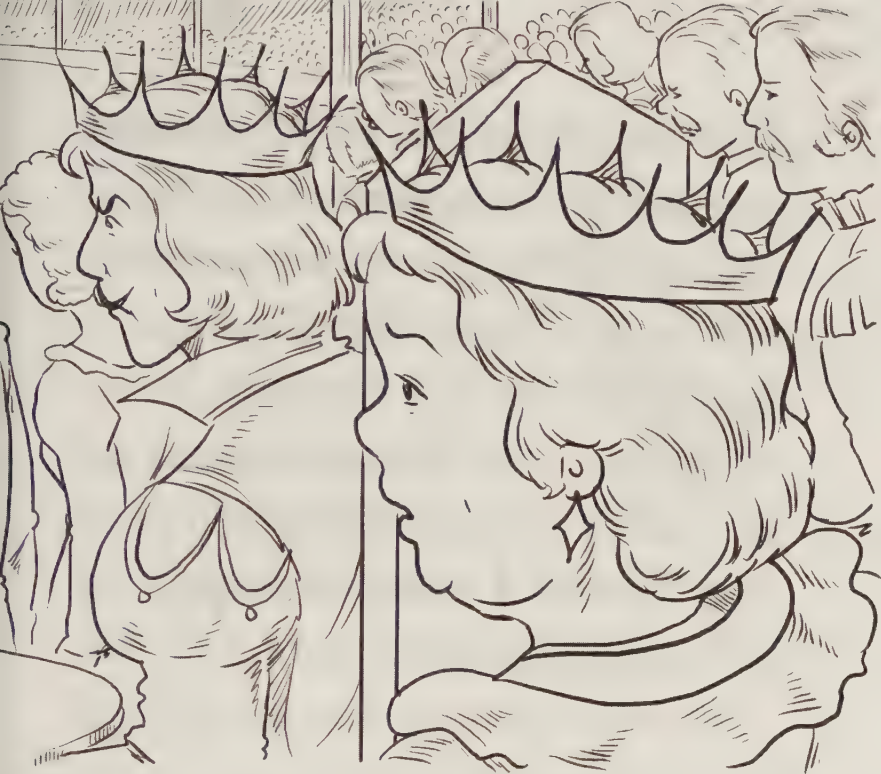






sword. But nothing could make Hamlet pull out of the fight.

Finally, the match began. The king and queen were also present, as were all the courtiers. Even Horatio had come to witness the spectacle. As they started sparring between



themselves, Hamlet was able to get the first two hits against Laertes. Claudius saw that Hamlet was proving to be better than Laertes, as the latter could not even get past



Hamlet's defences. So he decided to put his other plan into action, and asked Hamlet to take a break and have a drink. But Hamlet, seeing that he was winning, refused to stop. Things started to get rather animated between the two fighters. Laertes managed to hit Hamlet once and he



immediately started bleeding. Realising that Laertes was not using a blunt sword, Hamlet became infuriated and started fighting with greater vigour. Little did he know that he had also been poisoned with that cut.







Since the fight had now been going on for quite some time, the queen was tired. Seeing a cup before her, she reached out to take a sip. The minute Claudius saw what was happening, he screamed, "Stop, do not drink that!" It was the poisoned cup that he had kept for Hamlet, but alas, it was too late!

Meanwhile, the fight was becoming rather

severe. During the match, both contestants dropped their swords once and, by mistake, picked up each other's sword. Now Hamlet, fighting with Laertes' sword, was able to draw blood from his opponent. He was about to continue, when he heard his mother scream, "Son, I have been poisoned!"



Laertes too had fallen,
his own poison mixing with





his blood. Horatio exclaimed,
“They bleed on both sides.
How is that, my Lord?”

To this Laertes said, “It is
the king, Hamlet. He planned
the whole thing. He has
poisoned your mother. He has
poisoned the tip of my sword.



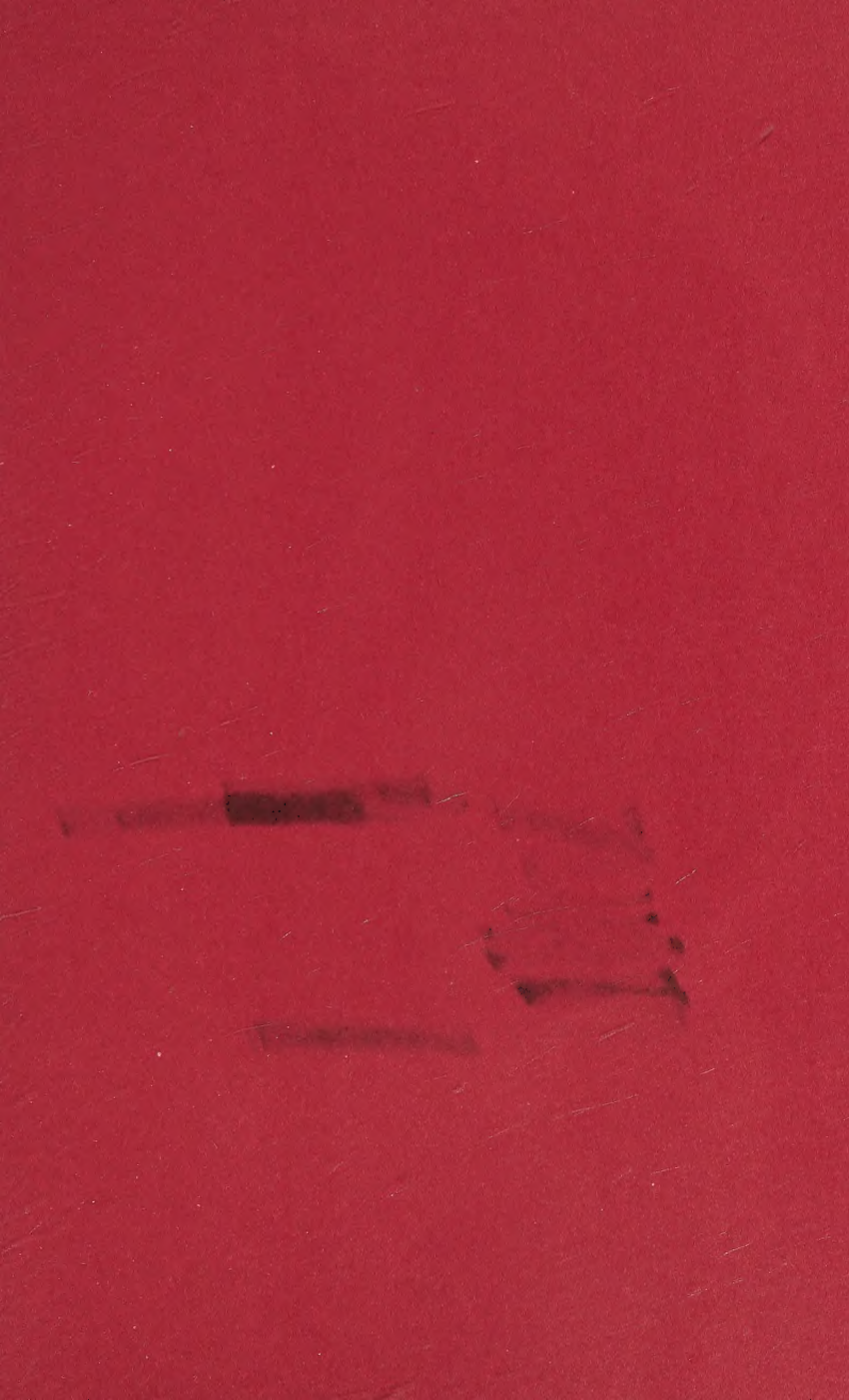
Nothing can save us now.
We are both going to die.”

Hamlet soon understood Claudius’ plan. Without wasting another moment, he pushed his sword towards the king, killing him instantly.

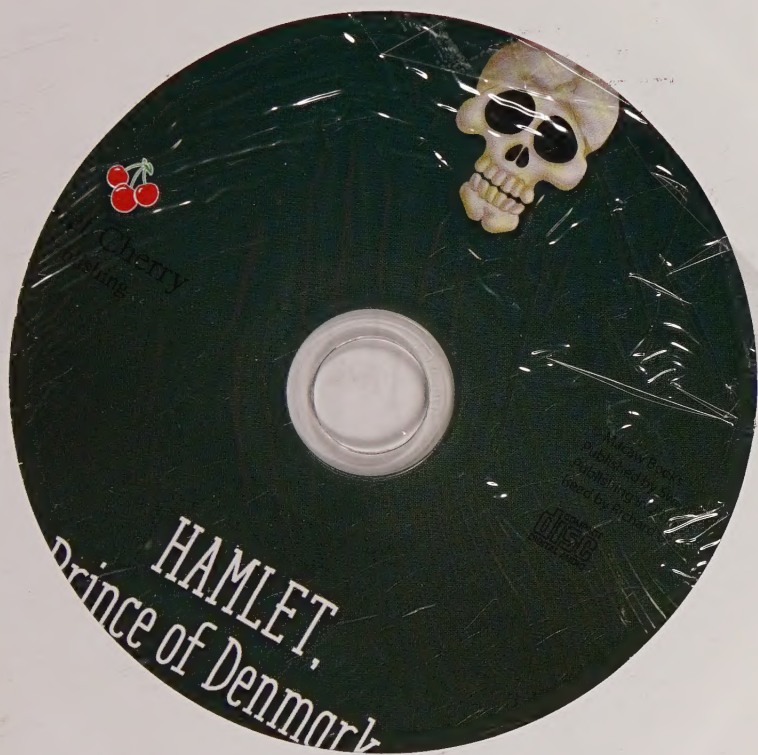




Falling into Horatio's lap, Hamlet said, "I am dying, Horatio. But you live, and must tell my true story to the world." And soon he was dead.



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HAMLET,
Prince of Denmark

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A SHAKESPEARE CHILDREN'S STORY



HAMLET, Prince of Denmark

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark is one of the most popular tragedies of the legendary playwright William Shakespeare. It tells the sad story of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, who, upon his father's death, returns from Wittenberg to discover the evil plot of his Uncle Claudius and his mother, Queen Gertrude. The play is focused around how Hamlet learns about his father's death and seeks revenge.

This short narrative version of the play has been suitably adapted to help introduce the play to young readers. It can be read by children or read to them by parents who wish to introduce them to the play. It can also be used by teachers as a classroom resource. The easy-to-read narration and comic-style illustrations are sure to captivate children's interest and develop their reading skills.

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